

## REQUESTING ACTION TO FREE WILLIAM N. OATIS BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT

AUGUST 2, 1951.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed

Mr. RICHARDS, from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, submitted the following

### REPORT

[To accompany H. Con. Res. 140]

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, to whom was referred the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 140), expressing indignation at the arrest and conviction of Associated Press Correspondent William N. Oatis by the Czechoslovak Government, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with amendments and recommend that the concurrent resolution do pass.

The amendments are as follows:

In the first clause, insert "the" preceding "fundamental".

Strike out the second clause up to the colon and insert the following clauses:

Whereas the treatment of William N. Oatis demonstrates that the Czechoslovak Government has willfully repudiated the principle of free information which is so essential to peaceful cooperation and friendly relations among the people of the world; and

Whereas the persecution by the Government of Czechoslovakia of other American citizens is condemned and deplored by the people of the United States, and throughout the free world

In line 3, strike out "farcical arrest and" and insert "arrest, sham trial, and unjust".

In line 4, strike out the comma and insert a semicolon and "that the executive agencies of the Government be requested to take all possible action to bring about his release;".

#### I. COMMITTEE ACTION

House Concurrent Resolution 140 was introduced on July 6, 1951, by Hon. John V. Beamer, and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Similar resolutions were introduced by Hon. Laurie C. Battle (H. Res. 352), Hon. A. A. Ribicoff (H. Con. Res. 141), Hon. Edna F.

Kelly of New York (H. Res. 348), Hon. Walter H. Judd (H. Res. 350), Hon. Frank T. Bow (H. Res. 333), Hon. J. Percy Priest (H. Res. 334), Hon. Clarence J. Brown of Ohio (H. Res. 340), Hon. Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts (H. Res. 344), Hon. Peter W. Rodino, Jr. (H. Res. 345), and Hon. Tom Steed (H. Res. 347). These resolutions were also referred to the committee.

On August 1, 1951, the committee considered House Concurrent Resolution 140 in executive session, during which it voted unanimously to approve the resolution with certain perfecting amendments and those designed to strengthen the language of the resolution.

## II. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

House Concurrent Resolution 140 was initiated solely by the legislative branch of our Government. It sets forth in strong language and plain terms the indignation of the United States Congress at the arrest and unjust conviction of Associated Press Correspondent William N. Oatis, by the Czechoslovak Government. Further, it requests the executive agencies of our Government to take all possible action to secure his release.

### A. THE FACTS

William N. Oatis, a United States newspaperman in his middle thirties, began work for the Associated Press in Marion, Ind., in 1937. He is an Army veteran of World War II. Oatis went to Czechoslovakia in June 1950 as Prague bureau chief for the Associated Press. He was the only American in this bureau.

The Czechoslovak authorities arrested him on April 23, 1951, acknowledged on April 26 that he was arrested and detained, informed the American Embassy on May 16 that he had confessed to "espionage," and brought him to "trial" on July 2. After proceedings lasting 2 days, he was sentenced on July 4 to 10 years' imprisonment subject to reduction to 5 years for good behavior. The presiding judge spoke of extenuating circumstances and the expulsion of Oatis from Czechoslovakia at the conclusion of the term of imprisonment.

### B. ACTION BY THE UNITED STATES

The committee has been informed that the American Embassy in Prague, acting on its own initiative and upon instruction from the Department of State, has pressed repeatedly through oral representations and by formal notes to obtain Oatis' immediate release and consular access to him. The Embassy sought, without success, to send him articles of personal comfort and to arrange American legal counsel for him. In all of these efforts, Ambassador Briggs has had a number of meetings with the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister.

Hon. George W. Perkins, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, has taken up the Oatis case with the Czechoslovak Chargé d'Affaires in Washington.

### C. DEPARTMENT OF STATE PRESS STATEMENTS

On July 4, 1951, the day Oatis was sentenced, the Department of State issued the following statement:

The mock trial of the Associated Press representative at Prague, Mr. William N. Oatis, has now been brought to a conclusion. The sentencing is but an epilogue to this ludicrous travesty of justice in which the victim was required to speak his prefabricated "confession" as a part of a public spectacle exhibiting all the usual Communist trial techniques. This was prepared and rehearsed in advance under police auspices and by customary Communist police procedures when Oatis was held incommunicado for 70 days between his arrest and presentation in court.

The proceedings revealed the flimsiest kind of alleged "evidence," even more insubstantial than the Communists are accustomed to produce in trumped-up trials of this type. For example, the normal routine requests of the Associated Press for news reports, openly transmitted by wire, were distorted into "espionage missions on orders from centers in New York and London."

Such an attempted hoax on the intelligence of world opinion will fool no one. While it had all the trappings of legal procedure, it was in fact a kangaroo court staged before the klieg lights of propaganda. Its purpose was purely intimidation and propaganda designed to strike at the United States, at United States press services and against the free press of the world.

The confession of espionage was in truth but the admission of an American reporter that in the high traditions of his profession he was attempting under the most unfavorable conditions to report a true picture of conditions and events in Czechoslovakia as he saw them.

The Czechoslovak regime has clearly demonstrated that it considers legitimate and normal news gathering and reporting as espionage. As the prosecutor publicly stated, Oatis was held to be a particularly dangerous espionage agent because he insisted on obtaining accurate, correct, and verified information. To do this is a crime, according to the concepts of the present Czechoslovak authorities, who find any press activity except the transmission of official propaganda to be espionage. The Czechoslovak Government thus rejects completely the principle of freedom of information. It is presumed that the press of the free world will so view this turning back of the clock.

The proceedings of this especially arranged spectacle also included a number of groundless accusations against the American Ambassador and other members of the United States Embassy staff. These were invented as a part of the entire propaganda performance in attacking the United States.

This action comes as a climax in the treatment of American citizens in Czechoslovakia. It has accordingly been necessary to recognize that it is no longer safe for American citizens to go to that country and to prohibit private travel there until further notice.

If further evidence were needed, the arrest; the detention for months without access to friend, Embassy representative, or trusted legal counsel; the forced confession to fabricated charges; the shabby conviction of William N. Oatis shows that the present regime in Czechoslovakia fears truth, hates liberty, and knows no justice (press release No. 589).

At a press conference with the Secretary of State on August 1, 1951, the following colloquy took place:

Question. Mr. Secretary, what do you hear from the Czechs on the Oatis case?

Answer. We have heard nothing which is satisfactory from the Czechs on the Oatis case. This is a matter of the utmost importance both to the Government and to all the people of the United States. We have, as you know, already taken some action in regard to it. We have other action in preparation. It is a matter in which I wish I could talk to you very freely, but I am sure it would not be to the interests of Mr. Oatis to do that. It is a matter to which we attach the very greatest importance.

Question. The Czechs have not suggested any terms?

Answer. No.

Question. Did they ever answer our note asking that a United States representative be allowed to see Oatis in jail?

Answer. They have refused to do that. I mean they have refused to let a representative see him.

### III. ANALYSIS OF RESOLUTION

Czechoslovakia as a member of the United Nations and as a signatory of the Charter has pledged itself to promote fundamental

human rights and freedoms in accordance with the terms of the Charter. Article I, paragraph 3, of the Charter provides:

The purposes of the United Nations are: "To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

The arrest and unjust conviction of Oatis by the Czechoslovakian authorities contravenes this pledge. Further, this outrageous action on the part of a fellow member of the United Nations repudiates, in the language of the resolution, "the principle of free information which is so essential to peaceful cooperation and friendly relations among the people of the world." This principle lies at the heart, not only of our system of Government, but also of the fundamental freedoms outlined in the United Nations Charter. Article I, paragraph 2, of the Charter provides that it shall be one of the purposes of the United Nations "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace." The utter disregard by the Czechoslovak Government of the principle of freedom of information is the very action that develops unfriendly relations among nations and certainly weakens universal peace.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This resolution has the overwhelming support of the American people. They, and this committee, justly feel indignant when a totalitarian regime exercises its totalitarian power to abuse an American citizen. The principle of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of information, is vitally important to the American people and its Government. It is the hope of the committee that the passage of this resolution will impress the Czechoslovak Government with the indignation of the Congress at that Government's utter disregard of the freedoms we cherish.